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## HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE TEACHING OF HISTORY IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

ABSTRACT. Šubrt Jiří, *Historical consciousness and the teaching of history in the Czech Republic* [Świadomość historyczna i nauczanie historii w Republice Czeskiej]. Studia Edukacyjne nr 24, 2013, Poznań 2013, pp. 195-223. Adam Mickiewicz University Press. ISBN 978-83-232-2576-8. ISSN 1233-6688

This article deals with the problems of teaching history in the Czech Republic. The findings contained in it have been obtained under broadly conducted research of historical consciousness of the population of the Czech Republic, carried out in the years 2009-2012. This project included several partial investigations, carried out through qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The research focused on the population of the Czech Republic, especially on teachers of history from primary and secondary schools. This article focuses on four research questions: a) how important is the knowledge of history and teaching of history for Czech citizens? b) from where do people derive their knowledge about history and what role does the teaching of history play? c) how is the teaching of history at primary and secondary schools considered from the perspective of citizens and teachers? d) what problems are now commonly associated with the teaching of history at Czech schools? It tries to identify the strengths and weaknesses of contemporary history education in Czech schools.

**Key words:** historical consciousness, collective memory, quantitative research, qualitative research, teaching history, history teachers

In this paper we discuss selected issues in relation to historical consciousness and history teaching in primary and secondary schools in the Czech Republic.<sup>2</sup> Basic research questions relate to asking what the position of teaching history in Czech society is, and what problems are associated with it. To answer these questions, we monitor several problem

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areas. At first, we focus on the basic reference framework of our research, defined by the concept of historical consciousness. Thereafter, we address four problem areas related to the importance that is attached to the teaching of history in the Czech Republic, how this teaching contributes to the creating of the historical consciousness of the population, how it is assessed and what problems it faces. We derive our findings from research activities conducted in the years 2009-2011. The aim of this paper is to reveal the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and risks that may be identified in the history teaching of the Czech Republic.

### The concept of historical consciousness

Today in post-communist countries the concept of historical consciousness seems untrustworthy to many intellectuals. Its lack of credibility lies in its associations with previous Marxist ideology, historical materialism, theses regarding the dialectics of being and the consciousness or the importance of class consciousness. Moreover, this concept may even evoke memories of the theory of social consciousness that was developed by Soviet theorists during the Seventies and Eighties (one of the leading theoreticians being A.K. Uledov<sup>3</sup>) and imported into other countries of the so-called socialist bloc.<sup>4</sup> It is no wonder that most scholars in post-communist countries, when they engage in people's relationship towards the past, prefer the concept of social (collective, cultural or historical) memory. In the past two decades the concept of social memory has enjoyed the overwhelming (one might even say exclusive) interest of researchers,<sup>5</sup> becoming the subject of

<sup>3</sup> A.K. Uledov, *Struktura společenského vědomí*, Praha 1973.

<sup>4</sup> See e.g. J. Vaněk, *Teorie společenského vědomí*, Praha 1980.

<sup>5</sup> In recent decades French scholars especially have set the tone of research on collective memory [J. Šubrt, Š. Pfeiferová, *Kolektivní paměť jako předmět historicko-sociologického bádání*, *Historická sociologie*, 2010a, 1, vol. 2, p. 9-29; J. Šubrt, *Antinomie sociální paměti*, *Sociológia*, 2011a, 43 (2), p. 133-157; J. Šubrt, *Kolektivní paměť: Na okraj jedné legendy*, *Sociologický časopis*, 2011b, 47 (2), p. 395-407]. Some of the research that has been conducted by the historian Pierre Nora, known for his project *Les lieux de mémoire* (1984-1992), also extending into sociology. Tzvetan Todorov [1998] in France, known for his studies on people's behaviour in extreme situations during the Second World War, draws on the method of oral history. In sociology, Gérard Namer (1987, 2000) has been instrumental in rediscovering and finding contemporary applications for the work of Maurice Halbwachs, and he emphasises the plurality of forms of collective group memory and shows how this concept can become the subject of sociological research. Danièle Hervieu-Léger, the author of *La religion pour mémoire* (1993), departs from the premise that every religion encompasses in itself a specific activation of collective memory. The philosopher Paul Ricœur, in his book *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (2000), examines from a historical-philosophical perspective the relationship between experience and historical memory, responsibility for the past, ques-

innumerable studies, and an instrument of contemporary political and ideological disputes and conflicts. The concept of historical consciousness is, by contrast, rather marginal and forgotten by many. Nevertheless it cannot be completely ignored, and specifically for research into the problems of teaching history in primary and secondary schools it may prove to be useful.

Expressions of social memory and historical consciousness overlap, but cannot be identified with each other, and one cannot permanently replace the other. The outline given by Jürgen Straub can serve as a starting point for our interpretation. He combines historical consciousness with historical narrative construction and historical meanings in the field of the human mind.<sup>6</sup> Peter Seixas defines historical consciousness as well as individual and collective understandings of history, which are influenced by cognitive and cultural factors.<sup>7</sup> It is essential that part of historical consciousness is a historical understanding of the present and the future. Jörn Rüsen characterizes historical consciousness as a specific orientation which is used in the process of solving current situations.<sup>8</sup> So already we can see that historical consciousness is to be understood not only as a complex of knowledge, perceptions and ideas about the past, but primarily as an awareness of certain specific contexts (or continuities, discontinuities and changes) between the past (stored in the collective memory), the present and the future, and as a consciousness which has contributed to shaping people's attitudes towards the present and the future.

The precise problem of historical consciousness becomes apparent when we start thinking comparatively. It is useful to recall that during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century there was a widespread sense that history had a certain meaning and direction. It was a period dominated by what is often called "historism". At that time, the horizons of past and future had a different form and depth than they have today. The past suggested trends directed towards specific goals across eras, in which the fulfilment of a historical plan was to be accomplished. The future had the character of a mainland to which – after a long trip - people would apparently soon arrive. At this time faith in progress, in large emancipatory "stories" announcing the

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tions of guilt, and the space for forgiveness. In German-speaking countries, the subject of social and cultural memory has been most notably addressed in the work of Jan Assmann (2001, 2007) and Aleida Assmann (2006, 2009). In the U.S. currently develops research topics and politics of memory especially Jeffrey K. Olick (2007, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> J. Straub, *Telling Stories, Making History: Toward a Narrative Psychology of the Historical Construction of Meaning*, [in:] *Narration, Identity, and Historical Consciousness*, ed. J. Straub, New York – Oxford 2005, p. 48-49.

<sup>7</sup> P. Seixas (ed.), *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, Toronto 2004, p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> J. Rüsen, *Historical Consciousness: Narrative Structure, Moral Function, and Ontogenetic Development*, [in:] *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, ed. P. Seixas, Toronto 2004, p. 66.

arrival of happy tomorrows, was still very much alive. Also notable, however, were decadent moods of *fin de siècle*, in which the fate of mankind was associated with the idea of doom and ruin. Learning from the incidents and disasters of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this trust in the sense of history and the “grand narratives” – as highlighted by contemporary thinkers<sup>9</sup> – has evaporated. On the contrary, a hundred years later the consciousness of late modernism concentrates in the present, and historical consciousness is somewhat “flattened”. For people living in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century the past is another country, their historical consciousness has a different nature.

Today’s culture, following the great trauma of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is characterized by fundamental mistrust and scepticism towards the “great narratives” of history (theory of history, theory of progress) and the future (emancipatory projects, ideology). As a result, there is a quite reasonable hypothesis that today’s people cannot see – in comparison with their predecessors – the causes for the present, or look back to the past, or look with hope and expectation to the future. Despite this, interest in history is not unfamiliar to many people, which is reflected inter alia in the popularity of historical literature and films. So the question is, what can history offer today’s man? Historian Miroslav Hroch<sup>10</sup> speaks about nine possible answers to this question:

1. History is a storehouse of stories that we may enjoy, believe and understand.
2. Detection of historical facts is an intellectual challenge.
3. Past events are or should be a source of enlightenment.
4. History provides us with personalized role models, but also warning examples.
5. History is a sequence of events that we want to understand, while at the same time we want to understand the contemporary world.
6. In this effort, we may be also affected by essential history and by its current general background and principles.
7. Past events can be a source or justification of current demands (gender, group or national).
8. The past is a source of values that enable us to understand our merit and give insight into the meaning of our existence (in terms of individuals and groups).
9. History provides arguments and incentives for self-identification and group cohesion.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> J.-F. Lyotard, *O postmodernismu*, Praha 1993.

<sup>10</sup> M. Hroch, *Historické vědomí a potíže s jeho výzkumem dříve i nyní*, [in:] *Historické vědomí jako předmět badatelského zájmu: Teorie a výzkum*, ed. J. Šubrt, Kolín 2010, p. 37.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem, p. 31-46.

It should be clear from the above-mentioned list that history's relevance varies for different groups of people. From a societal perspective, the final point may be regarded as particularly important. The past's importance is above all in terms of our collective identity and two fundamental questions connected with it – who we are and where we are going. History reinforces this identity by the consciousness of a jointly shared descent, adds arguments for the assessment of our current status, and creates a presumption for searching for and shaping a common future.

The concept of historical consciousness has been used and elaborated in a number of professional contexts. The first was in German philosophy, where the concept *Geschichtsbewusstsein* appeared. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century it appeared in the philosophy of life of Wilhelm Dilthey,<sup>12</sup> followed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by Hans Georg Gadamer<sup>13</sup> in his hermeneutical philosophy. *Geschichtsbewusstsein* in this concept is seen as a prerequisite for the understanding and interpretation of past events. It is a consciousness able to judge the past according to itself, not the standards and prejudices of the present time.

In the 1970's some German experts on the issue of teaching history began to work with the concept of *Geschichtsbewusstsein* (Bodo von Borries, Karl-Ernst Jeismann, Hans Jürgen Pandel, Jörn Rüsen and others<sup>14</sup>), but in a somewhat different context than that presented by philosophical hermeneutics. In their approaches the term is associated primarily with the question of educative activities and meaningful connections between the idea of the past and orientations towards the present and the future.

Other suggestions then came in the 1980's from the area of narrative psychology, which developed particularly in the U.S. (Jerome S. Bruner, Theodore R. Sarbin<sup>15</sup>), but which also found expression in Germany (Jür-

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<sup>12</sup> W. Dilthey, *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften*, Frankfurt am Main 1981 (1910).

<sup>13</sup> H.-G. Gadamer, *The Problem of Historical Consciousness*, [in:] *Interpretive Social Science: A Reader*, eds P. Rabinow, W.M. Sullivan, Berkeley 1979, p. 103-160.

<sup>14</sup> B. von Borries, *Geschichtslernen und Geschichtsbewusstsein*, Stuttgart 1988; B. von Borries, *Geschichtsbewusstsein als Identitätsgewinn? Fachdidaktische Programmatik und Tatsachenforschung*, Hagen 1990; B. von Borries, *Das Geschichtsbewusstsein Jugendlicher. Erste repräsentative Untersuchung über Vergangenheitsbedeutung, Gegenwartswahrnehmungen und Zukunftserwartungen von Schülerinnen und Schülern in Ost- und Westdeutschland*, Weinheim 1995; K.-E. Jeismann, *Geschichtsbewusstsein als zentrale Kategorie der Geschichtsdidaktik*, [in:] *Geschichtsbewusstsein und historisch-politisches Lernen*, ed. G. Schneider, Paffenweiler 1988, p. 1-24; J. Rüsen, *Geschichtsbewusstsein: psychologische Grundlagen, Entwicklungskonzepte, empirische Befunde*, Köln 2001; J. Rüsen, *Historical Consciousness: Narrative Structure, Moral Function, and Ontogenetic Development*, [in:] *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, ed. P. Seixas, Toronto 2004, p. 63-85.

<sup>15</sup> J. Bruner, *Acts of Meaning*, Cambridge 1990; T.R. Sarbin (ed.), *Narrative Psychology: The Storied Nature of Human Conduct*, New York 1986.

gen Straub<sup>16</sup>). This psychological direction, working with the concept of *Historical Consciousness* (*Historisches Bewusstsein*)<sup>17</sup>, emphasized that people view their lives as stories, whose versions they present to others as solving current life situations.

In the discussions that have taken place among historians in the Czech environment, historical consciousness is usually characterized in two ways<sup>18</sup>. While some perceive it as a rather vague general impression of history, as a state of mind dependent on the nature of time and subject to variability, others tend to reduce it to a summary of the knowledge of history held by a certain group or community. In this latter approach, historical consciousness based on the reception of professional expertise is used to distinguish historical awareness as the summary of knowledge that has non-historiographic, i.e. non-specific character.

The approach applied in our research understands historical consciousness as an important area of human knowledge, which is largely shaped by the teaching of history ongoing in primary and secondary schools. This approach to historical consciousness is inspired by the concept of the sociology of knowledge, specifically its wider interpretation as formulated by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann<sup>19</sup>, according to which the sociology of knowledge should encompass everything that a given society considers to be knowledge. This means not so much the great bodies of knowledge embodied by religion, ideologies, utopias, art and science, but rather the kind of (general) knowledge or historical knowledge possessed by 'ordinary people' as actors in everyday social life. Understood this way, historical consciousness to us is more than just a matter of theoretical reflection, it is also a subject of empirical research, not only in the general population, but also especially for teachers of history, who have an opportunity to shape and influence to a large extent the historical consciousness of the younger generation.

<sup>16</sup> J. Straub (Hrsg.), *Erzählung, Identität und historisches Bewusstsein. Die psychologische Konstruktion von Zeit und Geschichte*, Frankfurt am Main 1998; J. Straub, *Telling Stories, Making History: Toward a Narrative Psychology of the Historical Construction of Meaning*, [in:] *Narration*, p. 44-98.

<sup>17</sup> The term *Historisches Bewusstsein* gradually pushes next to the term *Geschichtsbewusstsein* even in German environment. See, e.g. [J. Straub (Hrsg.), *Erzählung*; V.B. Georgi, R. Ohliger, *Crossover Geschichte: Historisches Bewusstsein Jugendlicher in der Einwanderungsgesellschaft*, Hamburg 2009].

<sup>18</sup> In the Czech Republic these discussions have not yet found their way (apart from texts published before 1989) into representative publication outputs which could attempt to find a more elaborate definition of historical consciousness. Traces of these discussions, however, can be found on various websites. Czech historiographers that used the term historical consciousness include J. Křen, Miroslav Hroch, Z. Beneš and many more.

<sup>19</sup> P. L. Berger, T. Luckmann, *Sociální konstrukce reality: Pojednání o sociologii věděni*, Brno 1999.



Our research project, focused on empirical research of historical consciousness, was carried out three yearly stages. In 2009, qualitative methodology was used, namely the method of *focus groups*, for the initial “mapping of the field” and to gain the primary knowledge for the preparation of the questionnaire. Later that year, the first questionnaire survey “Akter 2009” was undertaken, which served mainly as preliminary research in preparation of the second phase of the project. That represented a large questionnaire survey, “Historical consciousness”, which took place in late October and early November 2010. The third and final phase of the research in 2011 was linked again with the use of *focus groups* that aimed to complement and extend the information necessary for the interpretation of the acquired knowledge.<sup>20</sup> In this paper, we focus on the part of this research project which in some way – whether directly or indirectly – touches on the teaching of history at primary and secondary schools. In doing so we concentrate on four research questions: a) how important for Czech citizens is the knowledge of history and teaching history, b) from where do people derive knowledge about history and what role is played by the teaching of history; c) how is teaching history at primary and secondary schools considered from the perspective of citizens and teachers; d) what problems are now most commonly associated with teaching history at Czech schools. To answer these questions, we use the acquired data, of both quantitative and qualitative nature.

### **What is the importance attributed to knowledge of history and teaching history**

On a general level, it can be said that the Czech public does not attach any great or vital role to the knowledge of history. Approximately half of the adult population (53%) considers the knowledge of history important. Only one tenth attaches “definitely a great” importance to the knowledge of history. In total 42% of respondents ascribe it little (35%) or even very little importance (7%). The two groups are numerically relatively even, with a slight ascendancy of those who believe that knowledge of history is important (see Fig. 1)

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<sup>20</sup> J. Šubrt, Š. Pfeiferová, *Kolektivní paměť jako předmět historicko-sociologického bádání*, *Historická sociologie*, 2010a, 1, vol. 2, p. 9-29; J. Šubrt, J. Vinopal et al., *Historické vědomí obyvatel České republiky: Perspektivou sociologického výzkumu*, Praha 2012 (in print).

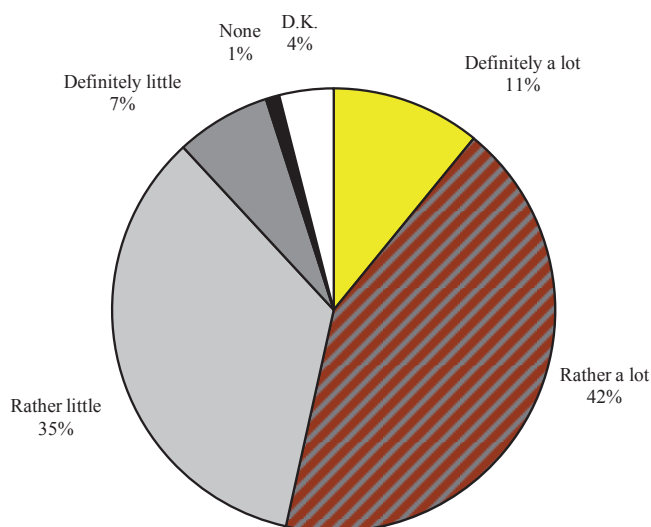


Fig. 1. What importance do you ascribe to the knowledge of history generally?

Source: Historické vědomí (Historical consciousness) 10/2010;  
1,459 respondents older than 15 years

But it is equally important to point out that attitudes regarding the importance of the knowledge of history are far from being equally distributed through Czech society; for example, people with a university degree more frequently (26%) attach to the knowledge of history “definitely a lot” of importance than those with lower education. In general, such ascription undoubtedly relates to different historical experience.

Qualitative interviews in smaller groups (*focus groups*), which took place in 2011, provided a better insight into the possible interpretations of the importance that people attach to the knowledge of history. Participants in focus groups often react spontaneously and strongly disapprovingly to the provocatively formulated thesis that knowledge of history is unimportant (for instance “*it’s silly*”) and are rather inclined to the view that the knowledge of history is important for understanding the present; it enables one to see things in context and provides support and guidance for understanding current problems: “*When I know my roots and I know what went before, I can understand what is now.*”

The dominant conception of history, evident from the various observations of group discussions, is the perception of it as an important source of inspiration. We can learn how various problems in the past were dealt with, follow the knowledge and skills of ancestors, be inspired by what has



worked and warned by what has not. At the same time, however, variously explicitly formulated doubts frequently emerge about whether people are able to ever learn from previous mistakes (“... *people are incorrigible*”). There is perceived to be a contrast between the potential of history to learn from it, to be inspired by it, and a realistic evaluation of the inability to use this potential, which sometimes leads to fatalistic notions. It seems, therefore, that at the normative level people agree in principle with the thesis of learning from history; however, in the same breath, they question whether this is at all possible in practice.

The awareness of history was ranked by participants in the discussions as part of the basic knowledge which every individual should have available and which is a prerequisite for culture and the general education of contemporary man. This knowledge, it was repeatedly said in various formulations, helps to conceive of a wide space-time context, where we belong and who we actually are; in other words: it contributes to the shaping of national identity and to the sense of belonging.

Last but not least, there tentatively emerges the view that the knowledge of national history is one of the basic prerequisites for the development of the national pride of people who are sufficiently aware of how difficult a process their society had to go through; what problems it surpassed and what it achieved. Regarding the sharing of national history and national identity, there are also ambivalent statements. On the one hand there was talk about the positive aspects or connotations of national history and cultural heritage in terms of the individual, on the other hand some respondents pointed out that the past includes people and events that they recognize only reluctantly, but nevertheless are an integral part of the national history and our heritage that cannot be erased and still affects us. Furthermore, our knowledge of history according to some opinions equips us with substantial arguments and makes us resistant to a variety of efforts of deliberate manipulation and distortion of facts. It may also have a significant moral benefit for society, because it leads to the tolerance of differences and a better understanding of the problems of others.

A significant aspect of historical consciousness is represented by the importance that is given to history in our society from the perspective of the present and the future, i.e. whether people understand the events of earlier periods as something that is reflected in their current lives or not, and whether history represents information that may be usable in the present or the future. The findings of the research show that, in the Czech Republic, a large part of the population attaches a great importance to

history especially from the perspective of the present. Approximately two equally large parts of the population incline either to the opinion that history in many ways affects our present and its learning therefore can help us to make decisions about the future, or to the view that history and its knowledge is a cultural heritage which helps to create a national identity and helps to maintain the continuity of society. Besides these two opinion streams which positively accept history and its knowledge, there is also the view that history has no logic and that you cannot learn from it, and therefore it has no meaning for our present or future. People who incline to this opinion are strongly convinced that the present time and looking to the future are important and that the knowledge of history is therefore not important (see Fig. 2).

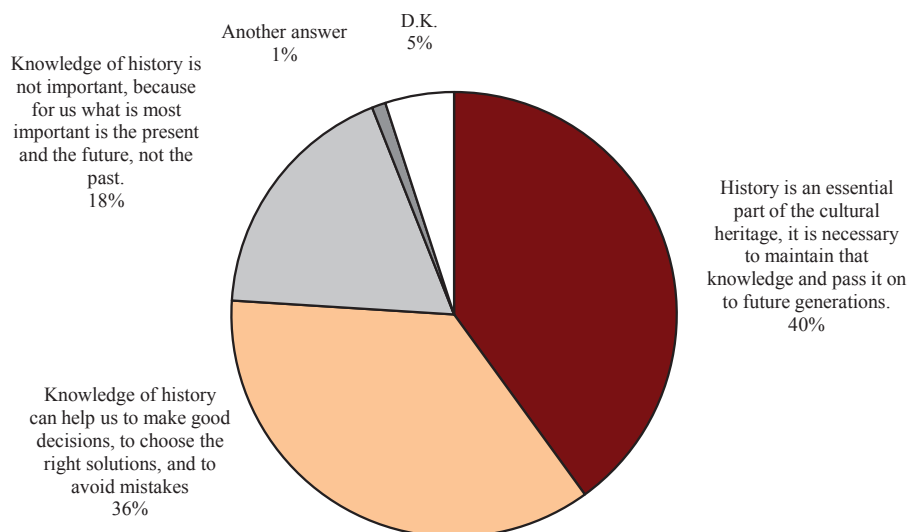


Fig. 2. „...Which of these opinions is closest to your own?”

Source: Historické vědomí (Historical consciousness) 10/2010;  
1,459 respondents older than 15 years

The three mentioned opinion types were identified by using factor analysis of sets of statements that represent them, and with which the survey respondents expressed their approval or disapproval. They represent three basic types of historical consciousness identified in the Czech public and they can be described as: positively affirmative, noetic-instrumentalist and historical nihilistic.<sup>21</sup> The strength with which especially

<sup>21</sup> J. Šubrt, J. Vinopal, *K otázce historického vědomí obyvatel České republiky*, Naše společnost, 2010, 8 (1), p. 9-20.

the first two mentioned types are present within the Czech population points to the aforementioned relatively high importance that the Czech public attaches to the knowledge of history.

The importance attributed by the public to the teaching of history at primary schools is shown by Figure 3. 43% of the Czech adult population understand it as “definitely important”, while another 37% of the Czech public considers it “somewhat important” (the vast majority of the Czech public, in total 80%). By contrast only a marginal segment of the population considers the teaching of history at primary schools unimportant (for about 10% of respondents teaching history at schools seems to be “somewhat unimportant” or “definitely unimportant”).

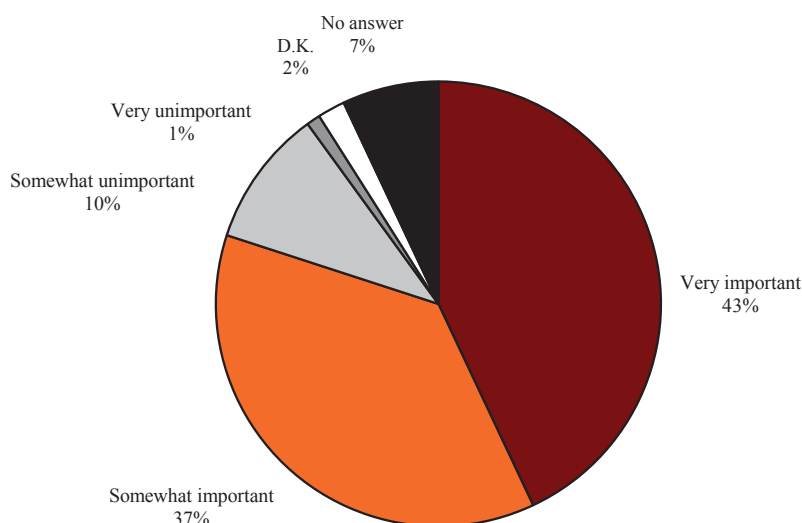


Fig. 3. „How important do you think it is to teach history at basic school? Do you thing teaching history is:”

Source: Historické vědomí (Historical consciousness) 10/2010;  
1,459 respondents older than 15 years

Although support for the teaching of history goes across Czech society, its intensity significantly differs, for instance among particular groups with different levels of education. As the level of achieved education rises, the evaluation of the importance of teaching history increases. Only 35% of people with primary education consider teaching history as “definitely important”. In contrast, people with A-Level equivalent (56%) and particularly university graduates (63%) see the teaching of history as certainly important more often. Also, older people and pensioners ascribe the teach-

ing of history at schools slightly above-average importance (56% see the teaching of history as “very important”).

In the research *Education – (non-)public interest* from 2008<sup>22</sup> the importance of teaching history, in the context of other school subjects, was rated by the general public as relatively highly (in seventh place out of 18 evaluated subjects (see Table 1).

Table 1

## Evaluation of the importance of school subjects

Subject	Average score for subject	Rank
Foreign languages	6,35	1. to 2.
Czech Language and Literature	6,31	1. to 2.
Mathematics	6,07	3.
Information and communication technologies	5,79	4.
Geography	5,16	5.
Nature History	5,07	6.
History	4,98	7.
Physics	4,89	8.
Chemistry	4,77	9. to 14.
Health Education	4,72	9. to 14.
Ethics Education	4,72	9. to 14.
Environmental Education	4,70	9. to 14.
Civics	4,64	9. to 14.
Physical Education	4,63	9. to 14.
Working Education	4,48	15.
Arts and Crafts	3,85	16. to 17.
Music	3,81	16. to 17.
Religious Education	2,50	18.

Note: Subjects are rated on a 7-grade scale (7-the greatest significance, 1-the least relevance). Subjects with an average score higher than 4 are therefore seen as rather more important, and those with an average score of less than 4 rather less important. This means, that value 4 bisects the continuum of scale into its positive and negative parts.

Source: Education - (non-)public interest, 2008; 1,518 respondents aged 18 to 69.

<sup>22</sup> The research was conducted at the Institute for Research and Development of Education, the Charles University in Prague, Faculty of Education. E. Walterová, K. Černý, D. Greger, M. Chvál, *Školství – věc (ne)veřejná? Názory veřejnosti na školu a vzdělávání*, Praha 2010, p. 163-168.

This gives a more complete and comprehensive perspective on the Czech public's evaluation of the importance of individual school subjects, and the place of history in it, and allows the application of factor analysis. With its help three more general groups of school subjects can be identified with regard to their importance. From the respondents' point of view there is an absolutely essential group (1) of "core subjects": foreign languages, Czech language and literature, mathematics, and additionally information and communication technologies. These subjects have in common that they are perceived by the public as an absolute basis, as core subjects for the time of basic compulsory schooling. The second group of subjects are subjects dealing with animate and inanimate nature (chemistry, biology, physics, and partially geography), but just including history, which is the subject of our analysis. The third and least important group is perceived - at level of primary school - to be a group of subjects marked as "cultivating subjects": health education, environmental education, ethics, civics, etc. In this case, with respect to the general public, they are rather "residual" subjects to which people do not attribute much significance.

Using secondary analysis, we can express, with great caution that the evaluation of the importance of school subjects, including the position of history, has proven to have, over the past two decades, a relatively high degree of stability. The available data cannot demonstrate any dramatic rise or decline in the popularity of the teaching of history. However, it must be said that in the sociological research on education in the 90s, questions which related to the content of school education were rather marginal.

Qualitative research (by means of *focus groups*) showed that the role of teaching history in the education and training process is currently considered irreplaceable; and not only among teachers, but also among the general public, it is believed that it is necessary to make a firm start as early as the first primary school, where pupils acquire elementary knowledge about history, mainly national history. At the second level of elementary education the teaching of history has a traditional place which in effect no one today disputes. As for secondary schools and high schools, the teaching of history is given differing levels of attention and importance according to the type of school. Mainly it is considered sensible, but there sometimes arise questions as to whether this teaching at some type of school is too little or on the contrary too much. It is clear that at technical schools the ideal volume of teaching history is difficult to identify; moreover, a view is emerging that this education need not be only general, but could be oriented to a certain extent towards the history of particular fields.

Teachers often see the function of history as a source of learning, helping us to avoid the mistakes which our ancestors made. With somewhat

wearying frequency we encounter the line, *"who does not know his past is condemned to go through it again."* Some teachers then ascerbically add that while we can try to learn from the history, people and indeed mankind remain incorrigible. In the eyes of students such widely shared beliefs may degrade the meaningfulness of history.

History, in the opinion of teachers, should also assist orientation in the contemporary world and its problems. Some teachers then directly declare that the interpretation of history may be applied directly to the present time (*"I begin each year the same way: we write a quotation that history is the lecturer of life, which teaches us to understand the past, to recognize the present and to take care of the future"*). Of course the question is how comprehensibly to convince pupils and students about this fact, while it is evident that this is the motivation that teachers have the first place. In this sense history is understood more broadly as teaching to ensure full, informed and mature citizenship.

In addition to social functions (avoiding the mistakes of the past, orientation in the world), there was one very interesting but rather minority opinion given referring to the ontogeny of human culture and the identity of man: *"Historicity exists as a factor that also shapes humanity. The fact that man structures himself historically, relates to the fact that man exists; not with any political or social utility of historical knowledge, but with the humanity as such."* Let us add that it is also very interesting what teachers did not speak about at all. On the explicitly asked question for the function or the logic of teaching history at elementary and secondary schools, no one mentioned the formation of national identity, the formation of a common historical consciousness or the feeling of being part of a single imaginary community.<sup>23</sup> However, the school itself and the official interpretation of history play a vital role in forming national consciousness.<sup>24</sup> This aspect can be considered a "hidden curriculum". Alternatively, we may suppose that teachers are probably very well aware of this function of history in schools; however, on the relationship of their subject to nationalism in contemporary postmodern times they would rather not comment and instead distance themselves from it.

In general, we can conclude that history has retained a relatively high degree of respect, despite its considerable ideologization during the previ-

<sup>23</sup> Let us add that in the research *Education - the (non-)public interest* from 2008 [E. Walterová, K. Černý, D. Greger, M. Chvál, *Školství - věc (ne)veřejná? Názory veřejnosti na školu a vzdělávání*, Praha 2010, p. 175-180] representatives of the public saw one of the most important functions of schools in the formation of esteem and positive attitudes towards values, history and cultural heritage.

<sup>24</sup> Compare: E. Gellner, *Národy a nacionalismus*, Praha 1993; B. Anderson, *Představy společenství*, Karolinum, Praha 2008.



ous regime.<sup>25</sup> For that matter, links between the dominant socio-political system and the teaching of history are evident in all regimes. Teaching history within the system of state centralized education represents the absolutely key mechanism for the creation and reproduction of historical consciousness: "School history is the institutionalized form of the creation, transmission and preservation of the historical consciousness ... School history is the only systematic familiarization of all members of society with historical reality".<sup>26</sup>

### **From where people derive knowledge of history and what role the teaching of history plays in it**

The fact that most people are aware of history, and that this awareness is largely shared, is made possible by the existence of several institutions responsible for the spreading of information within society. Primarily this means the mass media and the educational system. As for instance Benedict Anderson<sup>27</sup> shows, only with the start of mass media was it possible to create a unified idea not only about the nation as a whole, but also about its history. As Anderson writes, nothing ensures continuity like the idea of the nation<sup>28</sup>; but conversely, without spreading within a certain community (by means of media and education) a certain shared image of national history, the existence of the nation is hardly possible. What are the specific resources which the inhabitants of the Czech Republic use or used during their lives for the acquisition of information? Research findings from the year 2010 are presented in summary form in Figure 4.

*Figure 4 shows that the most frequently used sources of information about history are television shows, feature films and historical documents; the least exploited, entertainment/ lifestyle magazines, radio programs, newspapers and their supplements. The 'Some other' option for obtaining information was chosen by only 28% of respondents and only 2% use this "other" (not included in the questionnaire) option very much, which suggests that in reality the mentioned information sources cover the area of used options well. The fact that among the most important sources of information about history is electronic media, and especially television broadcasting (which includes historical documentaries as well as historical fiction films), is not surprising,*

<sup>25</sup> Compare: Z. Beneš (ed.), *Historie a škola 3. Jak učit dějiny 20. Století*, Praha 2006, p. 27.

<sup>26</sup> Z. Beneš (ed.), *Historie a škola 2. Člověk, společnost, dějiny*, Praha 2004, p. 7, 9.

<sup>27</sup> B. Anderson, *Představy společnosti*.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 247.

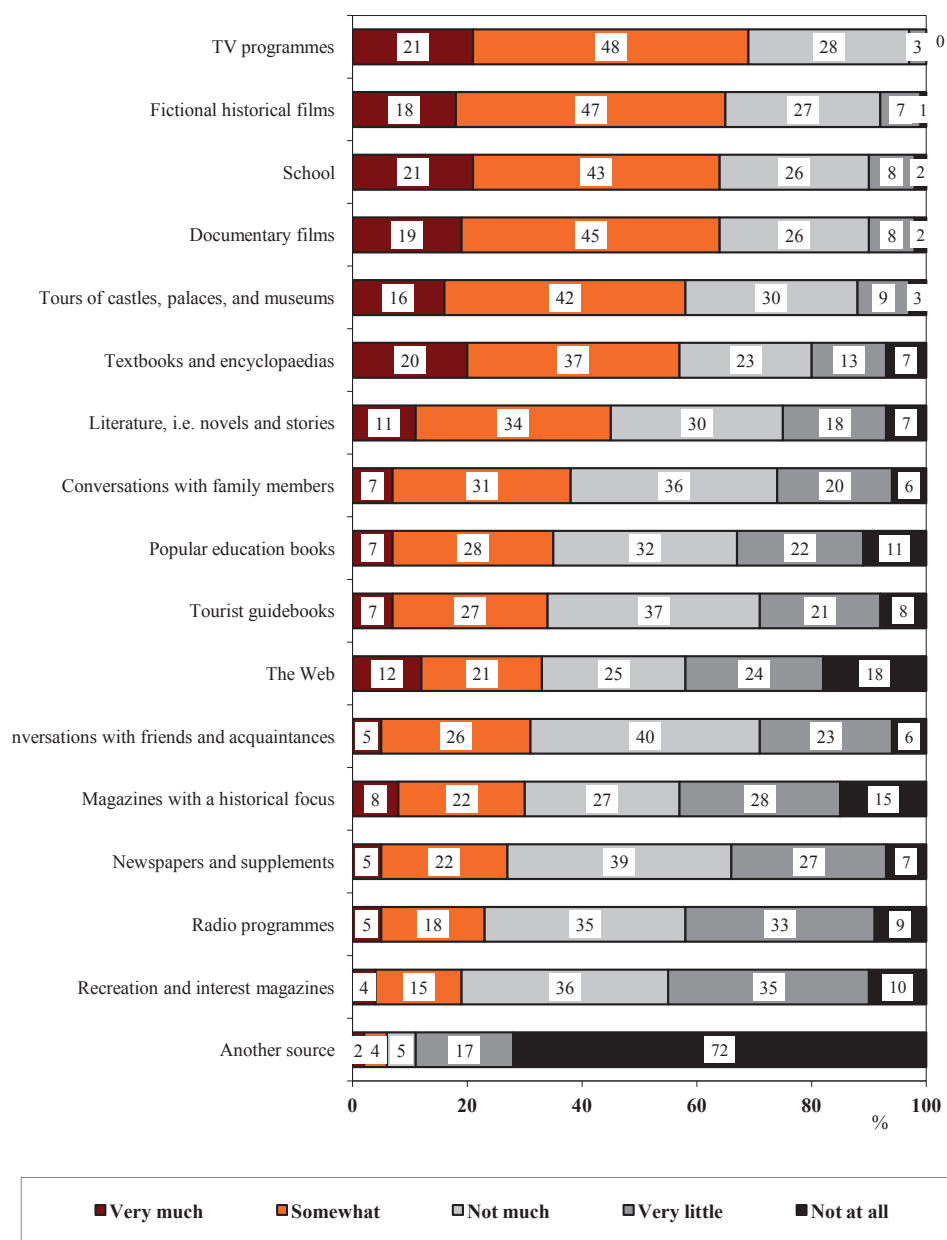


Fig. 4. „People obtain information on history from various sources. I'll read some to you, and you say how much in life you've used these sources for information on history and historical events”

Source: Historické vědomí (Historical consciousness) 10/2010;  
1,459 respondents older than 15 years

because watching TV occupies a significant proportion of the free time of essentially all social groups.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly, respondents attribute great importance to school as a source of knowledge, even though for different generations the teaching of history might have contained somewhat different emphases and (ideological) framing. Through compulsory schooling, at least at elementary school, education in history is experienced by everyone. Overall, no sources can be interpreted as marginal, because even “entertainment and societal magazines”, which are at the end of the scale, are used ‘very much’ or at least ‘sometimes’ by an absolute majority of respondents for the obtaining of information about history. This also shows the significant impact education has had on the use of different sources of historical information. In principle, with increasing levels of education, the intensity of the use of information resources is growing.

The Internet occupies a special position among these sources. Overall, the largest proportion of respondents (18%) indicated that they do not use the Internet for the purpose in question at all. This result, however, is strongly embedded generationally because 35% of respondents are people older than 60 years, who often do not use the Internet for gathering information about history - while the share of those who are younger than 45 years is only 10%. At the same time, the use of the Internet is linked to education. Among people over the age of 60 years who are university graduates, there only 16% do not use the Internet as a source of historical knowledge, while among those who have completed only primary school or apprenticeships, it is almost 40%; a similar relationship to the level of achieved education is also found in other age groups. A large proportion of respondents (15%) also does not use magazines oriented to history at all. But viewed from the other side, it is perhaps surprising that these thematically specialized magazines are used at least occasionally by 57% of respondents. There is of course the question of what exactly the research participants mean by “magazines oriented to history”, nevertheless this is a sign of a relatively high interest in history, which also corresponds to the observed readership of the selected titles. According to a readership survey, *History Review* has an average of 210,000 readers and the magazine *Mystery of Czech history* has an average issue readership of 125,000, which can be considered quite respectable in the context of thematically focused magazines.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> For example, according to the fifth wave of European social survey, only 3% of respondents that are older than 15 years do not watch television at all, and more than 80% of them are watching TV on average for more than an hour a day.

<sup>30</sup> These data are from the National Readership Survey Mediaprojekt focused on print media that is conducted for the Czech Publishers Association by agencies GfK and Median. The data cover the period of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> quarters of 2011.

## Teaching history from the viewpoint of its actors

Problems related to the issues of school history teaching in our research were studied primarily through qualitative methodologies (*focus groups*). For many people (both younger and older) the recollection of history teaching is associated with a not very nice idea of learning a large number of dates of historical events, which they usually no longer remember, and writing knowledge-based tests: *"It was just learning data. What I quickly acquired, I just as promptly forgot..."* By contrast, those who remember their history lessons usually emphasize the engaging and interesting input of the teacher, mostly associated with the art of storytelling. In this context, it is also often pointed out that the present time is characterized by such an excess of information compared to the past that it is very difficult to attract pupils' attention.

The prevailing view is that in the process of the teaching history we should abandon the uninteresting methods of memorizing historical facts and interpret the subject matter in context, looking for more illustrative and engaging forms of learning (*"Learning the precise date when something happened, in my view, seems less important than learning what impact the event had about 50 years later, to which it led"*). To achieve this, it is necessary to introduce the newer and more attractive teaching methods associated with visits to historic places, playful elements and options that provide modern media and interactive approaches, (*"It occurs to me that what should be put into lessons is invited contemporary witnesses who directly experienced the time, or even workers of various museums and so on, which would improve the lesson. Not to make it just about what the teacher lectures"*). Teaching history, according to discussion participants, could also be helped by teaching the subject matter more as storytelling and taking notice not only of great events, but also the problems of everyday life (*"I never learnt what I was very interested in, which was how those people at that time lived, how they dressed, and such interesting things I was just missing."*). Recommendations are directed also to the making of new textbooks able to awaken the interest of young readers. Teaching should somehow deal with the contradictory fact that one has, on the one hand, to master a large amount of names and dates, while, on the other, one must grasp events and understand them. It frequently appears as if these two requirements are contradictory. If for example a teacher overwhelms pupils with data and details, he has no time to explain the history he is teaching. In the statements of several discussion participants, however, there appears the optimistic point that the younger generation is already acquainted with the past

through new, usually more attractive, methods and with the help of materials that were not previously available with us.

According to the opinion of a number of teachers one of the essential problems is the low motivation of students. Pupils and students are very little motivated, and not only to study history, but also other subjects. They are distracted by a series of new phenomena - new media, computer games- which take them away from focussed studying (*"... it is increasingly difficult to attract them. There is a total decline of interest in anything. They focus on technology and not on humanities ..."*). Moreover, history - in terms of importance - is mostly perceived as a second-rate, the less important, subject. Teachers in this respect do not feel the necessary support from schools, parents and public. To improve the position and the "image" of history in this situation is accordingly very difficult.

There appears to be a certain problem in the use of textbooks. Although teachers have in this respect an element of freedom in that they can mostly select which textbooks they want to use in the process of their teaching, most of the available textbooks they have quite strong reservations about and consider less than ideal. Moreover, if it occurs that they decide which type of textbooks they want to use, it is usually necessary to continue with the old ones for several years, because the replacement of textbooks is financially costly. When it comes to the use of other learning tools (DVDs, projectors, interactive CD-ROMs, historical atlases, didactic images), teachers mostly declare an interest and willingness to use them, but at the same time they quite often complain about the lack of them, which is mainly due to limited financial resources, and also to the tendency to promote the teaching of other subjects, especially languages and computer technology, which have priority.

Teachers consider that many of the discussed topics could be attractive to students, but lose their popularity because they are linked to so much factual information which must be memorized and mastered to some extent. It is obvious that one of the key questions is how to design lessons to maintain a certain attractiveness (fun) and at the same time to get over information about the most important facts. In other words: how "to balance" "facts" and "stories" in a reasonable way. Attempts to enrich teaching by new, fresh and creative educational methods are apparently not - according to respondents - too frequent, because they mostly require from teachers something extra: it is necessary to leave the comfortable and well established routine, to devote time to more thorough preparation and deeper study, to have new ideas and more intensive work effort. (*"I have to prepare for it, but it is worth it."*). The higher-rated forms of education in this direction are mainly project teaching. Other elements with which

some teachers try to make their teaching more attractive include various quizzes, crossword puzzles, discussions about family history of pupils, videos, etc. But the use of these more entertaining forms of teaching is undoubtedly limited by the fact that the time of lessons is limited and first of all it is necessary to cover the content of the syllabus.

Discussions with teachers showed that the vast majority of history teachers differ in their interest in history as significantly as would be expected in the general population. Moreover, the majority do not show obvious or systematic efforts to continuously extend the knowledge in their discipline. For such teachers - as well as the rest of the population - a major source of information is watching TV. If they need to obtain some specific information, they very often use the Internet, where they mostly visit and use Wikipedia, even though some of them apprehend that it is necessary to deal with this source with a certain vigilance. For some history teachers their profession is also their hobby and they approach it accordingly (*"While travelling, I like to search for historical destinations. History has never been for me a discipline on a scientific basis. In private, I watch documentary films, read books; but it is not any academic curiosity ..."*). However, there are further exceptions. These are "enthusiastic" teachers, who are dedicated to history to a significantly greater extent than their professional duty requires; they try to keep an eye on what is new in the field, and they also devote a substantial part of their free time to it.

Teachers' perspectives on history are shaped not only by their theoretical or practical teachers' training for a career in this field, but as with others, also very strongly by personal life experiences. This particularly comes through the subjective experience of key periods, i.e. those intensely lived through and reflected on that represent the basic coordinates of their political and historical orientation in the world. The most frequently mentioned event of Czech history which occurred during the life of Czech teachers is the year 1989 and more generally the wider political, social and economic transformation which started in November 1989. Depending on age the traumatic year 1968 is often mentioned. Although other events are mentioned, there is a fairly strong consensus, and no one questions the epoch-making nature of the events of 1968 and 1989.

Very generally we can say that a significant number of teachers feel respect for their professional field and try to follow their profession in a serious way. The majority of them also care about the effect their teaching. At the same time a certain conservatism is evident which rests on certain established patterns of conduct in relation to the pedagogical process that are regarded as normal and satisfactory (*... at the beginning we review the*



*previous lesson, I explain any ambiguities, I set out the substance and we write a report...*). Considerations on some other, alternative, or significantly different approaches to the pedagogical work are rather remote to the majority of participating teachers. For these teachers, the present system of teaching history is something it makes little sense to radically question and change, but they would rather improve it by way of small steps of innovation. This conservatism is undoubtedly associated in some teachers with fears that they could be exposed to significant demands for change (methodological and content-wise) in their approach to their work, which for them, it seems, is not a very pleasant idea.

History teachers are usually found in a somewhat contradictory position. On the one hand they mostly attribute seriousness and importance to the subject they teach; on the other hand they reflect the fact that this relevance is often not attributed by others to their subject, which means primarily by students, but for instance even by school management or parents. In short: priority in the education and training process is given to other subjects. Teachers are also aware that history very frequently is not among students' favourite subjects, because it places considerable demands on the memory.

Discussions indicated that there are some differences within teachers' personal approaches to the teaching of history, from which can be deduced the hypothesis that in Czech schools there appear to be several different educational types (often not in pure, but rather in mixed form).

The minority type is teacher "enthusiasts", for whom history is not only a profession, but also a hobby they engage in after working hours. Characteristic of this type is the fact that they try to make history as attractive as possible (though they do not always succeed), and therefore they integrate to one extent or another innovative and playful moments. Usually they also try to organize excursions and discussions with contemporary witnesses or if need be develop extracurricular leisure activities.

A relatively frequent type is the "indifferent actor of the teachers' role", who is not personally seriously interested in history (usually they do not seem to be much more interested than other citizens), but tries to approach their profession so as to satisfactorily carry out the tasks which are perceived to be expected of history teachers. For such teachers it is often typical that they tend to prefer teaching historical facts. This can be for various reasons, and one of the most important is probably that many simply attach the greatest importance to such facts. This strongly corresponds the idea that the mission of history teachers is to teach pupils first of all just facts, and at the same time that success can be regarded as a kind of measurable effect of their teaching performance and skills.

An important factor, however, in many cases, may be that some teachers lack the broader context and the more attractive interpretation of deeper knowledge, and thus facts appear to them as something unquestionable.

Other types include teachers for whom history is their subject of “second choice” (for example in addition to physical education), and they usually do not particularly try to hide from their pupils that they more fully identify with another subject (*“For me it’s all more about the data. Therefore I’d rather realize my potential in civics.”*). A final particular type of teacher can be specified as “bohemian”, one who is unconvinced of the need for a steady and systematic educational performance, but who may be popular among students thanks to his lessons having a less formal character.

### History – remote and also close

The analysis of quantitative data reveals differences between the importance that the general public attributes to the knowledge of history in general (Fig. 1), and the knowledge of specific areas or aspects (Fig. 5). Specifically, importance is ascribed to the knowledge of Czech history (it is considered definitely or rather important by 83% of the Czech population over fifteen years). In second place is the importance of the modern history of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> century (76% consider this important). Family history (the history of the dynasty) is also assessed as relatively important, alongside the history of the region in which one lives. Participants consider European history least important (only 54% assessed this as “rather” or “definitely important”), followed by older history (ranked by 50%) and general world history (by 48%).

Obviously, the perception of the importance of the knowledge of history decreases with growing time-space distance: (a) the older the history is (see modern history vs. older history), the less important the knowledge of it, (b) if history is related to more remote areas, it is seen as less important (see the importance of Czech history and the history of the region vs. the relatively lower importance of European history and above all international history).

In the more detailed discussions (*focus groups*) it became apparent that these ideas in principle correspond with the views on how the school teaching of history should be hierarchically organized: from the most important Czech history, through the relatively less important European history, down to world history. Some emphasize the didactic logic of this hierarchy (*“Czech history ... should be emphasized. European history, certainly,*

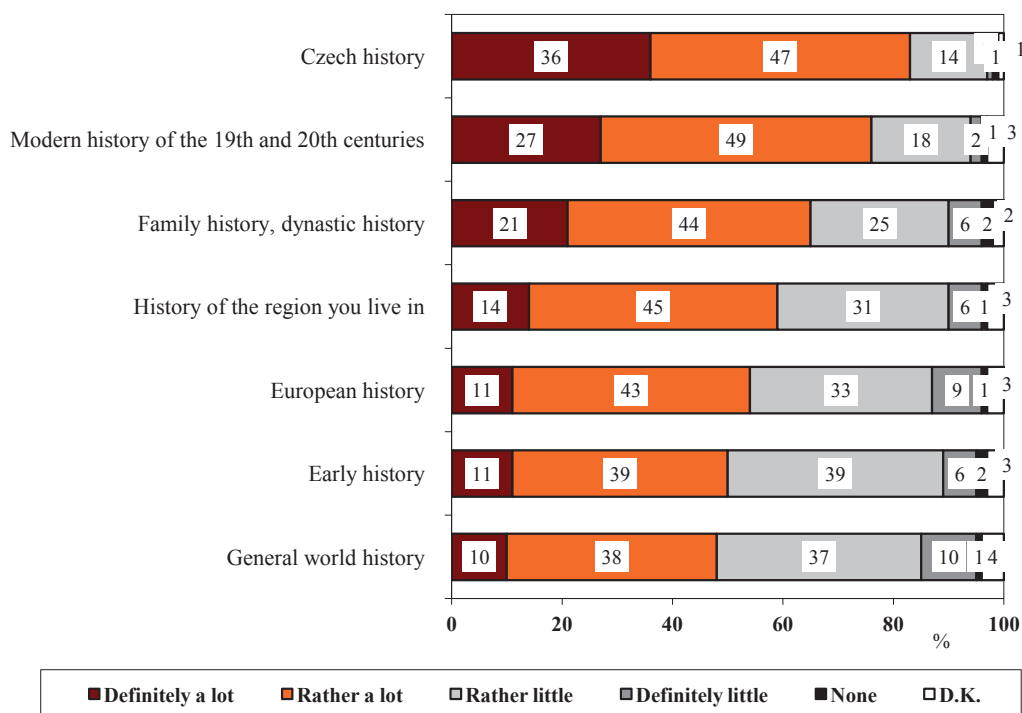


Fig. 5. „How important is it to have knowledge of various areas of history? I will read some to you and you tell me what importance you assign to knowledge of each one is:”

Source: Historické vědomí (Historical consciousness) 10/2010;  
1,459 respondents older than 15 years; question number 4

as well. This is the space in which we live. Then follows world history ... in consequence of it all.”) Others give their reasons rather more normatively (“This is right thing”), mostly from positions of national feeling and self-identification. More generally, it can be pointed out that, according to respondents, history should generally help our understanding of what is happening in the present, where the individual lives, and be a source of national identity. Therefore the knowledge of the Czech national history seems to be relatively more important than the knowledge of the history of the world.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, there are complaints suggesting that pupils at schools do not learn enough about the history of the world and

<sup>31</sup> Another – it must be said specific – possible interpretation of why part of the population puts greater emphasis on the knowledge of Czech history, relates to the certain negative perception of the knowledge of Czech history among other national societies. Quite regularly they repeat more or less frustrated declarations that „they” do not know our history, so why should „we” know their history.

about now relatively important regions of the world (e.g. China, India, the Muslim Middle East). Knowledge of European history is significant primarily because we are members of the European Union; we are dependent on Europe's economy and also on its politics. In particular, the middle and older generation emphasizes the up-to-dateness of the knowledge of European history, which it previously considered nothing like as crucial as now.

Let us add that even in this respect teachers are not substantially different from "laymen". The prevailing opinion among them is that Czech history deserves some 40% of hours, European history also 40%, and for world history the remaining 20% would be sufficient. If there are minor differences of opinion, it's almost always in favour of teaching more Czech history.

Furthermore, teachers more or less implicitly demonstrate that this somewhat ethnocentric or Europe-centric ideal is reflected in their daily teaching practice. They sometimes speak with disdain about the usefulness of teaching world history. They ask suggestive questions, for example, to what purpose, today, is a detailed knowledge of the history of China, Mexico or the colonies in South America? And they observe that in this respect the textbooks, to which they otherwise adhere, are mostly too detailed, so that they do not go through the corresponding chapters. At the same time quite often they emphasize the teaching of Czech history in connection with European history. However, this is not the interconnection of Czech and European history with global history. Nevertheless, in the question of where the lessons of history may be directed, teachers often declare the need to understand the increasingly integrated and globalized world (where events in remote regions directly and indirectly affect people's lives on the other side of the world), in which the contemporary students will live and in which they will need to be able to orientate themselves.<sup>32</sup>

The dilemmas of contemporary history, particularly the teaching of the Communist dictatorship (but also e.g. the expulsion of Germans in the border areas, some positive aspects of life in real socialism, etc.), appear as an independent problem. This has been reflected for some time in specialized Czech publications.<sup>33</sup> It is symptomatic that many teachers stated that

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<sup>32</sup> A quite marginal opinion spoke about emphasising the teaching of the Czech history at elementary school, but at the secondary and high schools proportions would no longer be significantly transformed in favour of European and world, because it is already more understandable for pupils of this age.

<sup>33</sup> E.g. Z. Beneš (ed.), *Historie a škola 3*; M. Aschenbrenner, *Úskalí výuky poválečných dějin na 2. stupni ZŠ*, [in:] *Výuka dějin 20. století na českých a slovenských školách*, ed. M. Aschenbrenner, Ústí nad Labem 2006, p. 31-35; B. Gracová, *Výzkum aktuální podoby výuky dějin 20. století na základních a středních školách*, [in:] *Výuka dějin 20. století na*

they had not encountered these problems in teaching, which is usually accounted for by the lack of time for discussion of everything in the syllabus (*"I teach only up to World War II, because I do not have enough space for teaching modern history."*). Underlying this most frequently-cited argument however, are often unconfessed fears and embarrassment over how to teach modern history. It is clear that for many of them this is a subject matter whose mastery requires relatively difficult preparation. In addition, it is a controversial theme, still alive, on which there are totally different views within the population, and many teachers might not yet have established an entirely consistent opinion on it.

But one of the reasons is the timing of the teaching of contemporary history in the last year of primary or secondary schools. In the lives of pupils or students this is an extremely stressful period that is filled with educational excursions, preparation for entrance exams and entrance examinations themselves, school cultural and sports events linked with the departure from the given school. For these reasons history lessons tend to fall off and unlike the history of antiquity or the Middle Ages and modern times, which are discussed in the earlier school years, real teaching "shrinks" to such an extent that the subject matter cannot be explained, *"But I cannot do it otherwise, because I cannot discuss new history earlier. You need to teach certain things prior to that. And so you have no other choice."*

Other minority reasons given include potential conflicts with parents, whose opinion on recent history may be different than depicted by a teacher at school. Teachers also refer to the fact that recent history is not properly, completely and comprehensively prepared in textbooks, and so they do not have the appropriate authoritative support for teaching this subject, to which they are otherwise accustomed as protection. Furthermore, older teachers also mention limitations in their professional training. They teach for years mainly what they learned of history at pedagogical faculties at the time of their studies, while in relation to recent history this knowledge - in their own words - is nothing: *"Maybe for my generation, it was a particular stressing factor that suddenly around the year 1989 the course radically changed. And it just has an impact on that history. Some teachers were teaching history as they learnt it at the faculty. Some of them had not even tried to look for other interpretations. And now suddenly we all have been groping."*<sup>34</sup>

českých a slovenských školách, ed. M. Aschenbrenner, Ústí nad Labem 2006, p. 51-57; J. Pešek, *K výuce dějin 20. století na českých školách*, [in:] *Výuka dějin 20. století na českých a slovenských školách*, ed. M. Aschenbrenner, Ústí nad Labem 2006, p. 9-15.

<sup>34</sup> An accurate characterization of the frequently cited "change of the course" was given by a middle-aged teacher who studied history at the faculty of education just in the revolutionary years: *"That somersault was crazy. That happened to me in the middle of the univer-*

Finally, the character of recent history is linked to problems arising today: *“Some of my colleagues did not want to teach it, because students get to know on which side of the barricade you are.”* Modern history grows right up to the present, the present follows from that. The evaluation of the present day, which is influenced by the different values or ideological preferences of teachers, then fundamentally shapes their approach to recent history.

However, if the function of history is to bring lessons for the present day, to cultivate the ability to situate current events against the past and thus help in understanding the modern world, leaving out recent history fundamentally blocks this. The present is in fact directly primarily linked to the most recent history, and continuity between the past and present, therefore, is in the eyes of students, disappearing just at the critical moment.

## In Conclusion

The research reported in this article shows that the positive reality - and therefore also the strongest feature - regarding the object of the study, is that the majority of the population of the Czech Republic attaches particular importance to the teaching of history and its relevance. This is understood as an intermediary of historical knowledge, linked with the outlook of people in the world today as an important co-creator of historical awareness and substantially participating in the formation of national identity.

One specific problem, and thus also weakness, however, is that history is – among other school subjects - perceived more as a secondary subject. This is felt both by the public and the pupils themselves, because in terms of the latter's plans and intentions oriented on their chosen future professions, history usually does not play any important role (with the exception of a small group of those students who are humanistic-orientated). A further problem is the fact that the acquisition of historical knowledge is bound to the knowledge of a wide range of factual data (especially dates, years of events), the acquisition of which is perceived as dull and boring. In addition, these days pupils and students are confronted by a large number of distractions from new media, particularly from the Internet, so they often do not consider history to be sufficiently

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*sity. It was amazing how suddenly it made a turnabout and everything completely changed during a single semester. It was amazing to watch those somersaults. In the summer semester they say “A”, and in the winter they gave an interpretation of something completely different.*



interesting and attractive. However, there are also some problems on the side of teachers. They often rely on routine and formal approaches to teaching, and are not very willing to enrich the education they offer with features that increase demands on their professional preparation. The specific theme that this concerns is the teaching of contemporary history, which a considerable number of Czech teachers unfortunately have a tendency to avoid.

An opportunity for the greater popularity and acceptance of history may come from new approaches and new methods of teaching, project education and the combining of historical knowledge with the knowledge of other subjects. However, these new elements must be used adequately, sensibly, with good sense and not excessively. Even today they cannot replace the passion, authority or charisma of the teacher. Moreover, in the hands of a teacher with a formal approach these new devices can become hardly anything other than one of the formal accessories of education.

One risk in the development of the field under study remains the possibility that if pupils and the general public fail to be convinced that history is more than the sum of knowledge about the “dead” past, but is something related to the present and future, the status of history could fall. An unsettled question for the authors of the syllabus is the relations between national, European and world history. Another problem of proportions is the ratio between the facticity of data on the one side and historical narration on the other. These are conceptual issues whose solution probably does not significantly affect the position of history, but offers ways to make it more fascinating and more attractive.

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## Świadomość historyczna i nauczanie historii w Republice Czeskiej

### Streszczenie

Artykuł dotyczy rozważań odnośnie problemu nauczania historii w Republice Czeskiej. Zawarte w nim ustalenia uzyskano na podstawie szeroko prowadzonych badań świadomości historycznej mieszkańców Republiki Czeskiej, dokonanych w latach 2009-2012. Projekt ten obejmował wybrane badania, przeprowadzone z zastosowaniem metod jakościowych i ilościowych. Dotyczyły one ludności Republiki Czeskiej, szczególnie nauczycieli historii szkół podstawowych i średnich. W artykule skupiono się na czterech pytaniach badawczych: a) w jakim stopniu istotna jest znajomość historii i nauczania historii dla obywateli czeskich? b) skąd czerpią oni wiedzę historyczną? c) w jaki sposób jest nauczana historia w szkołach podstawowych i średnich z punktu widzenia obywateli i nauczycieli? d) jakie problemy współcześnie dotyczą proces nauczania historii w czeskich szkołach? Artykuł ukazuje mocne i słabe strony nauczania historii we współczesnej czeskiej szkole.

**Słowa klucze:** świadomość historyczna, pamięć zbiorowa, badania ilościowe, badania jakościowe, historia nauki, nauczyciele historii

